

A look from the outside in



PHOTOS BY JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

...love, from pseudo surfing and jet skiing to wake boarding and knee boarding, the Marines have a wide variety of water sports on Lake Powee to choose from. Below, Marines march before a crowd at Gignilliat Community Center on Tuesday evening.

BY JESSICA SIDLEY
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SALEM — They are our sons and daughters, grandchildren and friends. They are our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. They are our parents and grandparents, husbands and wives. It's not always easy to remember that all of them live normal

lives outside the hellish realms of war, because our soldiers serving overseas are extraordinary.

For them, valor and courage aren't just words, they mean life and death.

They risk their lives on a daily basis to protect us and they don't think twice about it.

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LOOK: 'He won't stop saying thank you'

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Some would consider their work priceless, yet it leaves many permanently indebted to each soldier and their selflessness.

For the host families and organizers of the Returning Warriors program at Keowee Key, it's the perfect time to see the visiting Marines as the men and women they are, without the weapons and walls up.

Host mother Del Collings found she had much more in common with her visiting Marine than she could have guessed.

"We didn't have a biography on our Marine, so we didn't know what he even looked like when he got off the bus," she said. "When we were introduced, it was instantly comfortable."

As a first responder, Collings understood the plight of her soldier.

"He is a medic," she said. "He's usually the only line of treatment and help before a helicopter can arrive in the field."

Collings understands the work of a trauma medic, especially one that is the first line of life defense.

"He agreed that treating people out in the field is like looking under the hood of a car," she said. "You just have to get in there and fix the problem. You have to pull away from the fact that they are friends and people we know, or just people in general. You have to separate yourself from those feelings in order to save lives. Sounds cold, but it's true."

While you'd be hard pressed to find a host family that wants recognition for opening up their home, Collings finds it quite sweet that they are the ones saying thanks.



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Residents at Keowee Key donated numerous jet skis for the Returning Warriors to use during their stay on and around the lake.

"He won't stop saying thank you," she joked. "For everything. He's so sweet and polite. They all are."

For Roger C. Peace rehabilitation nurse and three-year member of the program, Tracie Hawkins, the event continues to get bigger and better.

"In years prior, we basically were here for the water sports, to make sure a Marine had adaptive equipment if they needed or wanted it out on the lake," Hawkins said. "Now, we have a nurse at every single event and that's an increase in presence for sure. It really speaks volumes about the dedication the hospital has to this program."

For the soldiers who have been

medically discharged and others who have suffered gun wounds and injuries from bomb blasts, if they are able, most of them can't wait to get back to work.

"They will rehabilitate and then work towards active duty again," Hawkins said. "If that isn't inspirational, I don't know what is. That's the

type of people we get to be around here. It's a great thing to be a part of."

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Editor's Note: At the request of the U.S. Marine Corps, we are not identifying the Marines interviewed or photographed for this report by name.

